

Historic events surround the opening of Aruba's National Archaeological Museum

The plaza in downtown Oranjestad fronting the new Museo Arqueológico Nacional Aruba, MANA, was filled beyond capacity with those who came to celebrate the grand opening of what is the most advanced museum of its kind in the Caribbean. They were treated to an evening of spectacle which examined cultural and historic influence on the region in a very entertaining and informative fashion.

Pomp and grandeur was emphasized by the presence of H.R.H. Princess Margriet and her husband Prof. mr. Pieter van Vollenhoven, who were special guests along with Aruba's Governor Fredis Refunjol, and Frits Goedgedrag, Governor of the Netherlands Antilles, Aruba's Prime Minister, Nelson O. Oduber and Prime Minister of the Netherlands Antilles, Emily de Jongh-Elhage, along with dozens of regional and Dutch dignitaries. They were welcomed to the plaza with a performance of typical Aruban carnival music from the group Le Groove, and following words of welcome from Minister of Finance, Nilo Swaen and the evening's Master of Ceremonies, Edwin Abath. A preshow by Takai Mohamed presented a mix of regional culture, past and present.

H.R.H. Princess Margriet and her husband were invited to assist Francisco Croes, a pioneer of archeological digs and study on Aruba in the official opening act. "Fan," as he is known to the archaeological staff headed by Raymundo Dijkhoff, had a natural interest and talent for researching Aruba's prehistoric past and for more than 20 years has participated in and encouraged the collection and documentation of artifacts.

Along with archaeologist Ramon Dacal of Cuba, he documented and described the famous Tanki Flip dig in 1994,



Princess Margriet, at left, admires a piece inside the museum, with Secretary of State Ank Bijleveld-Schouten, Netherlands Antilles Prime Minister Emily de Jongh-Elhage and, in background left to right, Governor Goedgedrag, Minister Lee and Governor Refunjol.

resulting in a more complete knowledge of the Amerindian population of Aruba; his example inspired a new generation of Aruban archaeologists.

Assisted by Arminda Franken-Ruiz, MANA Head Curator, and Aruba's Minister of Labor, Culture and Sport, Ramon Lee, H.R.H. Princess Margriet and Prof. mr. van Vollenhoven retrieved the remote control contained in the ancient pot held by Fan Croes, which set alight the museum's new logo, set high above the building and dramatically framed by the night sky. The new logo is inspired by a top-view of a ceramic ceremonial vessel recovered from the Tanki Flip dig, combined with other ceramics found in the museum, the most prolific type of artifacts housed in the new facility.

Princess Margriet, Governor Refunjol, and other noted dignitaries were invited for a private tour of the museum before it was opened to the

general public. During that time an elaborate production featuring the talents of Jackie Bernabela from Bonaire, Roy Colastica, Priscilla Maria and Roly Kelboom from Curaçao and Urmayn Dormoy of St. Maarten, along with Alydia Wever of Aruba was presented. This was a joint Aruban/Dutch production under the direction of Takai Mohamed and Aike Dirkzwager of Holland.

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The museum complex offers an authentic glimpse into 5000 years of regional history, with entertaining and interactive displays.

A project that took more than ten years to be realized, visitors are initially welcomed into the historic Ecury com-



Princess Margriet and Prof. mr. Pieter Van Vollenhoven alight the new logo with, at left, Arminda Franken-Ruiz.

plex of classic colonial type buildings which were restored, and a modern state-of-the-art section to house the ancient artifacts. The complex also includes a research center for serious study and a cafeteria.

During his address, Minister Swaen stated "the museum will bring a strong emphasis of Aruban culture to the everyday lives of island residents, and make the experience of tourists more profound." To celebrate their opening week and demonstrate the many ways in which the museum can do this, staff members are conducting daily special activities to acquaint islanders and visitors with the new museum and its many amenities.

In particular, the first temporary exhibition, titled "Rancho," will be in the lime-light. Aruba's traditional fisherman's quarter, on the western outskirts of Oranjestad



Francisco Croes

and where the museum is located, is the subject of a detailed study by historian Kees de Jonge.

Various interactive events geared to all ages will be featured throughout the week. For more information regarding their daily programs contact the museum at telephone number 582-8979 or via email: archeoadm@hotmail.com or archeo@setarnet.aw.